

Indirect Interpellations: Hate Speech and “Bad Subjects” in Mongolia

Franck Billé

Abstract

This article examines anti-Chinese hate speech in Mongolia and argues that in spite of its prevalence and pervasiveness it remains limited to a Mongolian audience, essentially constituting a vector of social policing. Its violence is thus largely exerted on Mongolian citizens themselves, particularly those “bad subjects” whose personal and intimate aspirations do not dovetail with the “good of the nation.” Through an ethnographic focus on Mongolian women, I illustrate how the experience of “bad subjects” intersects with nationalist narratives, both undercutting them and contributing to their perpetuation.

Keywords

Mongolia, xenophobia, women, gender, anti-Chinese discourse

Biographical note

Franck Billé is Research Associate at the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge. He is the coordinator of an ESRC-funded research program (2012-2015) on the Sino-Russian border (www.northasianborders.net). He can be contacted at franck.bille@gmail.com.

Introduction

Since the end of the socialist period in 1990, and in particular since the mid 2000s, Mongolia has witnessed a strong increase in xenophobia. To an extent, this situation is reflective of the broader move towards far-right politics that is taking place throughout the former socialist region where racially motivated attacks have been on the rise (King 2010, Likhachev 2007). But while countries such as Russia or Ukraine have seen the emergence of blanket xenophobia towards all kinds of (non-white) foreigners, nationalist narratives in Mongolia have focused almost exclusively on China. In the last decade, Mongolian public discourse has been saturated with anti-Chinese statements and acts of violence against Chinese citizens, but also against Mongols fraternizing with Chinese, have become an increasingly common occurrence. Popular songs, as well as graffiti found throughout the capital city Ulaanbaatar, explicitly call for the expulsion (and occasionally murder) of Chinese citizens, and nationalist groups have issued statements warning they would shave off the hair of women having sexual relations with Chinese men (Jargal 2007). Many rumors concerning alleged attempts by China to conquer the country through various deceitful means circulate in the Mongolian social body: the Chinese are suspected of growing poisonous vegetables to kill off the Mongols, of sending Chinese men to Mongolia to reproduce with local women in order to sire Chinese offspring, and of spiriting children to China under the pretext of adoption to harvest their organs (Billé 2008).

If nationalist extremists are a minority and are frequently criticized by the Mongolian majority for their excessive violence (Bolormaa 2007), research suggests that a sizeable proportion of Mongols subscribes to the idea that China has territorial and political ambitions over Mongolia and that the nationalists' basic premise is valid (Billé 2008, 2010a). Anti-Chinese sentiments are conceptualized, by both Mongolian and foreign scholars (Bulag 1998, Rossabi 2005), primarily as the product of fraught historical relations between the two groups, and frequently rationalized as Mongolian endeavors to defend their country and preserve independence. Often reductively interpreted as a direct response to China's rise (Branigan 2010), Mongolian xenophobia is in fact inextricably tied to local conceptualizations of ethnicity, the destabilization of gender roles and the emergence of urban modernity (Billé 2010a).

Closer investigation of this hate speech reveals surprising contradictions and inconsistencies. Thus, despite the widespread rumors concerning poisonous Chinese produce, Chinese restaurants are very popular in Ulaanbaatar, including with people who are most vocal about their anti-Chinese sentiments. More importantly, as this discourse takes place in Mongolian, a language which does not have transethnic reach, it tends to linguistically exclude Chinese. As the data in this paper will illustrate, while overtly directed at the Chinese, the actual audience of these messages tend to be limited to Mongols themselves. In this sense, it may be construed as a "China-themed" intraethnic nationalist discourse, ostensibly *about* the Chinese, but in effect *by* and *for* Mongols.

Anti-Chinese discourse thus essentially operates as a vector of social cohesion, seeking to create unity against a common enemy. As a choral, reiterative activity, Sinophobia constitutes a patriotic reaffirmation of Mongolianness. But if anti-Chinese sentiments and the protection of the nation have largely come to be perceived as equivalent and therefore beneficial to Mongols as a group, this discourse also has significant internal consequences for Mongolian society. The subjects of ethnic violence are more often than not Mongols themselves, in particular those citizens whose personal and intimate aspirations do not fully dovetail with prevailing ideas about what Mongolianness is. Potentially these “bad subjects” can encompass a large swathe of the citizenry, from elites and politicians, to people with foreign heritage, or ethnic and sexual minorities, but it is perhaps women who, as a group, find themselves most problematically positioned with respect to national narratives. The ethnography presented in this paper specifically addresses female experiences of nationalist anti-Chinese discourse, thereby highlighting the centripetal homogenizing force exerted on Mongolian citizens in the name of the nation.

The ethnographic material presented in this paper was collected over a period of thirteen months spent in Ulaanbaatar between fall 2006 and fall 2007. Additional material was gathered during a brief follow-up visit in summer 2009, as well as through internet media in the interim and since. Loosely structured interviews were carried out with two dozens individuals recruited through the snowball method, and supplementary views and opinions were also collected through direct observation and in-depth analysis of media sources. The media I monitored in the course of my

research was not limited to newspapers, but included other cultural modes of expression such as films, graffiti, songs, and music videos.

Sinophobia as *Communitas*

I met Mergen¹ during a trip to Hövsgöl lake in July 2007. He had been recommended to me as a reliable guide through a mutual friend in Ulaanbaatar. Like for many people in the region, his work was seasonal. Making most of his annual earnings in the summer through his work as a guide to foreign tourists, in the winter he tried his luck in Ulaanbaatar, working in bars or restaurants. Although usually eager to practice his English with “his” tourists, he was happy to become the teacher for once and often spoke with me in Mongolian. It didn’t take long for the topic of the Chinese to come up and I used this opportunity to tease out his feelings and experience in that regard. His responses were typical and therefore rather surprising for me. In spite of a virtual absence of Chinese people in his village or in the neighboring regional capital of Mörön, in the very north of the country, his statements were a perfect echo of what I had been hearing from Ulaanbaatarites: the Chinese were a terrible bunch, they had oppressed the Mongols for centuries, and were now eager to take the country back. When the discussion veered towards intermarriage, he was similarly emphatic: “If I got married to a Chinese girl, my parents would kill me!” He envisaged that some Mongolian girls may be tempted into marrying the handful of Chinese men living in the city (i.e. Mörön), but only if they were rich. Just like other interlocutors in the capital, he believed that money was the only rationale behind potential Sino-

Mongolian unions. For him, in a clear echo of the dominant discourse, love and affection were not part of the Chinese equation.

These statements about the Chinese, especially in light of an absence of any personal experience were rather problematic. Despite their reiterative and quasi-formulaic quality, they were clearly more than general opinions acquired through schooling or informal networks. Discussions about the Chinese routinely elicited highly emotional responses that bespoke a strong engagement with the topic. However, a closer look at the apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the formulaicity of such speech, augmented by a lack of direct personal knowledge, and, on the other, emotionality and affective involvement, can help tease out a number of theoretically productive hypotheses. I propose to build in particular on the discussion by Yurchak (2006) and his application, in the Soviet context, of Austin's (1962) distinction between constative and performative speech. "Constative" is the term used by Austin for referential speech, i.e. speech which states facts and describes reality, while "performative" is a special class of speech in which the enunciation constitutes an action. Austin gave as examples of performatives such utterances as "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*" or "I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow" (Austin 1962, 5) but this category can be extended more widely to encompass other types of statements that *do something* rather than merely *describe something*.

Expanding on Austin's point that constatives and performatives cannot easily be divided in a living language and that all utterances somehow perform both roles,

Yurchak proposes to look at both as *dimensions* of discourse, indivisible and mutually constitutive rather than binary oppositions (2006, 23). He suggests that it is precisely the normalization of all forms of authoritative discourse that helps the shift from the constative to the performative (2006, 59).

The situations described by Yurchak in which Soviet citizens would take on a fully participatory role in the electoral process in spite of a lack of candidate choice, was also seen in Mongolia with respect to political activity. Describing a political meeting in the early years of the socialist period, Strasser notes the fraternal atmosphere and the participatory role played by Mongols, despite the speeches being in Russian and therefore not comprehensible to the majority:

The speeches were in Russian, which Mongolians tried to use with more or less success, and though few understood it there was always great applause of 'Za'. . . Finally all rose to sing the 'International,' and the Mongolian hymn, after which a scramble began, the crowd being like a lot of children leaving school. (Strasser 1930: 266)

This participation and voicing of agreement with the utterance of *za* (a term here functionally equivalent to "yes") cannot be circumscribed to a constative statement since the actual content was not linguistically accessible to most of the audience. Here

the utterances are performative: what matters is the participation in these novel practices. Russian is here not a bearer of linguistic but of symbolic meaning, one of many elements in a kit of modernity, like the Russian boots and military caps, the “leather cases” and the “tight-laced Mongolian coats of blue and raspberry pink” described by Strasser. Through these utterances and new sartorial practices, the Mongols are “performing modernity.”

Pointing out the difficulties in creating a binary division between form and meaning, real meaning and pretense, Yurchak shows that new meanings can in fact be produced through repetition of authoritative speech acts (2006, 28). This performative dimension offers new meanings to statements such as anti-Chinese injurious speech,² which, on the surface, first appears to be both normative and unreflective. These new meanings are not necessarily positioned in opposition to the dominant discourse but, as a “citational practice” (see Butler 1997); they come to take on a new dimension precisely on account of this reiteration.

So while an anti-Chinese statement may be, in part, a reflection of personally-held beliefs, it also serves as a conduit for ideas and opinions that circulate in the social body and that may be acceptable and/or expectable. This socially-situated knowledge circulates informally through rumors (see Billé 2008) but is also formally taught through histories that emphasize the role of China as Mongolia’s main foe. This spectral image of China has also been explicitly articulated in the Mongolian political arena where politicians, particularly in the run-up to elections, are routinely accused of

pro-China leanings and Chinese heritage (Baabar 2005, Erdembileg 2007, Rossabi 2005). If, as I have argued elsewhere (Billé 2010a), Mongolian modern identity is contingent on a formal and absolute separation from China, then anti-Chinese sentiments may be construed as a form of paranationalist discourse aiming at eliciting social cohesion and group pride, essentially a vector for a sense of Mongolian *communitas*.

My suggestion that anti-Chinese discourse in Mongolia should be understood through its performative dimension rather than simply at a constative level is also supported by the very formulaicity of anti-Chinese discourse. These statements do not bring any new pieces of information to the listeners, merely new examples that reinforce common assumptions and stereotypes. What they do is to elicit a renewed sense of outrage, fear and anger as well as stoke national fervor and narcissism. In fact, the very formulaicity of these statements weakens the original, constative dimension: like a ritual, the actual words uttered are less important than context or repetition.

Internal Violence

The political narratives positing national autonomy as the teleological destiny of Mongols, obtained with the help of the Russians but always at the peril of being snatched away by the Chinese through various deceitful means, convey the rationalizations that Sinophobia is a valid emotional response, articulated as self-defense. However the violence (both actual and symbolic) witnessed in Mongolia and directed at the Chinese also has a direct centripetal effect on Mongolian society to the

extent that it enforces homogenization. Defense against Chinese political and cultural encroachment has led to a standardization of Mongolianness, guarding against external but also internal divergence. The central position of the Halh majority group, as discussed in detail in Bulag (1998), is one such consequence. As protectors of political and cultural authenticity, the Halh have come to stand as the emblematic "genuine Mongol" (*jinhene mongol*) and, as a result, forced Halhification has meant a lower status for minority groups within Mongolia. Buryats, already positioned as somewhat liminal to Mongolianness prior to the socialist period (Lattimore 1962: 8), are mostly considered as non Mongols in contemporary Mongolia, while other groups, such as the Monchak of western Mongolia, lack any kind of formal recognition (see Harrison 2007).

But violence is not merely a by-product of national autonomy. While overtly and explicitly directed at China, symbolic and actual violence targets, in fact, Mongols themselves. Sinophobia functions as a tool to discipline the Mongolian social body in an attempt to rally the group around the notion of collective good. By defining the rules of acceptable social behavior, this discourse encodes as selfish actors and traitors those who do not comply. But this internal violence is not distributed equally, and social policing operates along lines that are heavily gendered and heteronormative. For women, gays and lesbians, or other groups who do not align with the national project and who, in effect, resist against resistance, penalties can be heavy (Billé 2010b). It is important, however, to bear in mind that these prohibitions are in no way limited to these groups, and that disregard for social norms can have

fatal consequences for others as well. Kandiyoti (1991) has highlighted the disconnect between national aspirations and women, but this disconnect is also visible at other intersections. Thus the leader of the nationalist group *Höh Mongol* was imprisoned for murdering his daughter's boyfriend, who allegedly had studied Chinese and had established cultural links with China.

This latter example is, I argue, especially telling. Despite very violent anti-Chinese rhetoric calling for the murder of Chinese and the defense of outnumbered Mongols, the actual victims of the nationalist groups *Dayaar Mongol* and *Höh Mongol* appear to be largely Mongols themselves. In 2007, for instance, *Dayaar Mongol* issued the warning that they would shave the heads of prostitutes having sexual relations with Chinese men (Jargal 2007), and later broadcast videos online bragging about having "punished" women in this way.

This contradiction, compounded by the fact that anti-Chinese discourse is not linguistically accessible to most Chinese, suggests that Sinophobia operates largely at an intraethnic level. The violence attached to this discourse is also internal insofar as it takes place between Mongols: it warns and disciplines other Mongols and acts on Mongolian bodies.

Throughout the socialist and post-socialist period, China has often been used as a proxy for other kinds of dangers, many of them internal (Erdembileg 2007). During the socialist period, the most immediate human-driven³ danger faced by Mongols came

from other Mongols in the guise of purges and informers even if fears converged on outside threats such as China or Japan. In post-socialist Mongolia, the source of danger voiced in the media and in informal conversation points to China, but more visible and pressing issues are arguably those of corruption, poverty, homelessness, alcoholism and environmental pollution. These matters are certainly very much present in media forums as well but they rarely elicit the same passion and fury.

Also lacking sufficient visibility is the pervasiveness of marital violence. Some studies⁴ have estimated that one in three women in Mongolia is affected by domestic violence. If, increasingly, resources are being allocated to address the problem, a certain tolerance of marital violence as “traditional” and a cultural reluctance to air “family issues” in public are proving a difficult combination to overcome (Benwell 2006). Despite the general perception by Mongols that Mongolian women are emancipated and “free,” various traditions and proverbs illustrate the prevalent acceptability of wife-beating in Mongolian culture. According to some scholars, the situation may have been exacerbated in recent years by the increasing feminization in education and on the workplace as levels of alcoholism and employment rise for men, making disaffected young men more likely to turn to violence (Benwell 2006: 133; Bamana 2008: 62).

In such a context, the forces mobilized in defense of national independence and in the name of social cohesion against an external enemy can start feeling restrictive to a number of a nation’s citizens. And given the strong biological dimension of the

discourse, namely that the Mongolian gene pool must be preserved at all costs, some groups find themselves at a very different juncture vis-à-vis a “traditional enemy” such as China: namely women, as bearers of ethnic and biological continuity, and gay men, who do not fit the heteronormative and reproductive ideals of the nation. But while China is routinely depicted as the main danger against which to rally, Mongolia’s southern neighbor is not necessarily perceived as such by all Mongols. In fact, for some at least, China may even open up spaces of potentiality and liberties unattainable to them within Mongolia.

Interpellations

However before discussing some of the experiences of these “bad subjects,” I would like to look more closely at the ways in which this discourse operates, who speaks it, whom it interpellates, and what some of its unintended consequences might be.

According to philosopher Louis Althusser (1971) “interpellation” is the process whereby ideology, by addressing an individual, transforms her into a subject. The famous example he provides is that of a policeman calling out to an individual — “hey, you!” — who by turning round and responding is in effect hailed into existence.

Elaborating on Althusser’s concept as well as on Austin’s (1962) speech act theory, Butler (1997) has shown how “hate speech” interpellates the injured party as a special kind of subject. Through its invocation of convention and its sedimented meanings, hate speech gives the utterance its force (Butler 1997, 36). More importantly, she points out that through its judicial language, the state “actively produces the domain

of publically acceptable speech, demarcating the line between the domains of the speakable and the unspeakable, and retaining the power to make and sustain that consequential line of demarcation" (p.77). This latter point was in fact commented on by my friend Batsaihan, an Inner Mongol living in Ulaanbaatar, where he owns a restaurant, who exclaimed:

Here there are graffiti saying "Kill all Chinese" but you would never hear anything like that in China! The government wouldn't allow people to say such things. But here the government doesn't care, they don't take any stance!

For him, the permissiveness of the Mongolian state with regards to hate speech was not simply a symptom of weakness or an indication of democracy. He saw it as an implicit agreement, just as the vigilantes who had broken the signs of a number of Chinese restaurants in the area had been given free rein and not held accountable (Bolormaa 2007, Billé 2008). While convincing, the interpellation dimension in Butler's discussion with regards to hate speech is difficult to apply in the Mongolian context. Interpellation as a way of producing subjects is contingent on the understanding of the address by the addressee, but in Mongolia this is not always the case. With the exception of permanent residents, the majority of Han Chinese do not understand or read Mongolian.⁵ Sightings of injurious graffiti in Chinese have been reported to me by Batsaihan, and a few in English also exist, but the vast majority are in Mongolian. As far as I was able to observe, direct interpellations are also rare, and anti-Chinese

sentiments are not usually voiced openly, unless the person clearly does not speak Mongolian.⁶ In fact, interviews carried out with Chinese permanent settlers suggest that the older generation, which does not speak Mongolian well, may not even be fully aware of these sentiments.

Thus, if anti-Chinese speech is an interpellation, it is not immediately clear whom it interpellates. It does not speak *to*, nor even *at*, the Chinese but mostly *about* them. This is also true of speech about other foreigners. Near the end of my fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar, I passed by a beggar while walking down one of the main streets. Slumped against a wall, he extended his hand in expectation. In this instance I chose not to give any money, and I merely shook my head while muttering *ügüi* (no). The man, in an advanced state of inebriation, then shouted “go back to your country then!” I chose not to respond and continued walking.

Was this a case of interpellation, when the speaker assumed I wouldn’t understand? Indeed, I looked just like one of the numerous tourists who suddenly become omnipresent during the summer months in the capital. If anti-Chinese speech is a speech act, it may in fact be considered a form of indirect speech act in the sense that it appears to be about the Chinese but is in effect directed at the Mongols themselves. The Mongols constitute the vector of these speech acts and are also the ones to which the appeal is made. A recurring feature in anti-Chinese statements is the vocative calling out to Mongols (*Mongolchuud aa!*), interpellating Mongols as fellow sufferers, combatants, heroes and survivors, and warning them against trusting the Chinese.

The readership/audience is also collectively subsumed under the 'we' (*bid*) pronoun in order to stress the disconnect between self and the Other, but the effect of these addresses is to reinforce the definition and boundaries of Mongolianness through a process of forced inclusion. This is also seen in a violent anti-Chinese music video by the band "L.A. Face": while overtly attacking the Chinese, it in fact opens with the statement "For Mongols only" (*zövhön Mongolchuudad zoriulav*).

Even when the Mongols are not explicitly addressed, the fact that all this discourse takes place in Mongolian, a language which does not have transethnic reach, tends to limit the readership to a Mongolian audience. Graffiti, as textual signs embedded within the urban fabric of the city, can operate at various levels. In the case of the anti-Chinese graffiti mentioned previously (Fig.1), the message is unmistakably directed at the Mongols, exhorting them to resist and take action:

Ömhii amtai hujaa naryg balbaach balbaach
nutagtaa bid ezen n gedgee sanaach sanaach

Beat up, beat up the foul-breath Chinks

Remember, remember that we are the masters in our own land

The urgency of the message is emphasized by the grammatical structure: the imperative in *-aach* (*balbaach; sanaach*) is a form often used to express a concrete demand or an urgent request and this sense of urgency is compounded by the repetition of the verbs.

<insert Fig1.jpg>

Figure 1: "Beat up, beat up the foul-breath Chinks; Remember, remember that we are the masters in our own land" (*Ömhii hujaa naryg balbaach balbaach; Nutagtaa bid ezen n gedgee sanaach sanaach*). Photo courtesy of Krisztina Teleki, August 2009

Another graffiti, which incidentally has gained notoriety because of its presence throughout the city, reads "You mustn't kill people, but you can kill the Chinks" (*Hүн алж болохгүй, хуяа нарыг алж болно*) (Fig.2). Interestingly, this particular message is not the direct exhortation to kill Chinese people it may at first glance appear to be. It is, rather, an indexical message insofar as it points to another underlying message. This graffiti does not call for murder but constitutes both a *permission* to murder and an exoneration from guilt. More to the point, the assumption made here is that the readers, as Mongols, have the natural desire to kill the Chinese, thereby indirectly equating Mongolianness with Sinophobia.

<insert Fig2.jpg>

Figure 2: "You mustn't kill people, but you can kill the Chinks" (*Hүн алж болохгүй, хуяа нарыг алж болно*). Photo by the author, September 2006

But while the uneasy relationship Mongols have with the Chinese nation is dominated by sentiments of hatred and mistrust, there can be a wide discrepancy between the (virtually univocal) negativity of the discourse and actual practices. Some aspects of Chinese traditional and popular culture are highly valued, like martial arts (in the guise of Jackie Chan) or the hyper-modernity of Singapore and Hong Kong. There also appear to exist considerable dissimilarities in outlook in terms of class, with rich Mongols going on shopping sprees to Singapore (aka. "Singa") while poor Mongols trade at the border with equally poor Chinese. While their socialization as Mongols equips them with a similar set of preconceptions, their widely divergent personal experience of China can either confirm or help challenge stereotypes. But what interests me here is the dimension of love (or *jouissance* in Lacanian terms) that forms an integral part of hate discourse. In his discussion of interpellation, Althusser argues that the majority of the subjects of ideological discourse "work by themselves" (Althusser 1971: 181) but he also mentions the existence of others who are less compliant and whom he terms "bad subjects." His assumption is that these latter subjects, who do not recognize or respond to calls to behave in specific, socially-sanctioned ways, are somehow a failure of socialization. This view is somewhat limiting and does not elucidate the ways in which socialization occurs. Social psychologist Michael Billig suggests instead that these apparent failures of socialization are in fact a constitutive part of this process. By pointing at what is acceptable and speakable, the behaviors and impulses that are negatively defined as taboo become a particular object onto which transgressive desires become fixed (Billig 2004: 94-95). If Billig's analysis is correct, then feelings of desire for China do

not constitute a process of resistance against the dominant discourse but are on the contrary epiphenomenal to, and produced by, this very discourse.

This dimension of desire is perhaps at its most visible in its projected form, in wanting to become the object of desire for the Other. Thus the incessant portrayal of Mongolia as a historical lure for a powerful China constitutes a painful and horrifying prospect but elicits a perverse sense of enjoyment as well (see Salecl 2004: 52). This duality emerges in discussions of China, but also in narratives in which Mongolia is eyed greedily or aggressively by powerful and exotic Others. As I've explored elsewhere (Billé, forthcoming), numerous beliefs circulate in the Mongolian social body about the alleged desire of various actors to either appropriate or destroy Mongolia, such as Japan's long-term goal of resettling its surplus population in Mongolia, or the intention of al-Qaeda to bomb Ulaanbaatar.

Given this uneasy commingling of hatred and desire, research into the daily experience and practices of "bad subjects" can be especially illuminating. Many groups of Mongols can, for one reason or another, be considered "bad subjects," but, as touched upon earlier, one such group is women, whose bodies and generative capacity are discursively harnessed for the common good. For these national subjects, relationships with Chinese men are potentially dangerous and frequently secretive. Yet such relationships do occur.

"Bad subjects"

Because in the Mongolian cultural region ethnicity is conceptualized as being transmitted through the father's line, intimacy with the Chinese is particularly problematic for women. Mongols may not look too kindly on a Mongolian man entering into a relationship with a Chinese woman, but such occurrences, if they do happen, do not carry the same weight. What is particularly striking is that the Chinese, both men and women, are never portrayed as physically or sexually attractive. Chinese men are consistently imagined as rich and successful, and their appeal with Mongolian women is thus articulated on poverty and/or greed. Unfailingly these stories are narrated as cautionary tales in which innocent (and/or selfish) women enter into relations or marry Chinese men for financial reasons. Lacking this competitive edge (insofar as men are conceptualized as breadwinners), and perceived as less attractive than their Mongolian counterparts, Chinese women are never perceived as potential mates, which certainly contributes to making such unions invisible.

These various factors combine to position Mongolian women at a particularly significant juncture of identity and nationhood. The Mongols' right to protect their traditional way of life and culture demands sacrifices, but these sacrifices are not exacted equally from all. The differential between which group is expected to be socially responsible and who has the power to define what these responsibilities are highlights the gendered power structure undergirding the community. In Mongolia like elsewhere, nationalism "turn[s] the control of women, their bodies and their sexuality into a matter of national importance by defining patriarchy as the core of national identity" (Undarya Tumursukh 2001: 122). As was described earlier,

nationalist groups such as *Dayaar Mongol* have made this role very explicit by threatening to shave off the hair of women who have relations with Chinese men, using these threats as modes of discipline to impose strict allegiance to a national cause modeled on communal resistance against China.

Against this background of (largely male) national paranoia (Billé 2008), some specifically female strategies come to the fore. With the use of the term “strategy” here rather than “resistance,” I am drawing attention to the dangers of painting Mongolian women as a cohesive group, defined in opposition to a similarly cohesive cohort of male nationalists. Here “strategy” is akin to de Certeau’s (1990) “tactics” and affords us a certain theoretical leeway. As Kandiyoti reminds us (1991, 378), women both participate actively in, and can become hostage to, national projects. As such, they can strategize and negotiate personal niches while remaining implicitly aligned with national and communal concerns. As I will illustrate later, acceptance of, and resistance to, the national project often cohabit within the same individual. Despite nationalism being largely male-driven, women often do support and promote the nationalist cause (see for instance Blee 1991, Scheck 2004).

Even when explicitly supporting nationalist views – at times vocally urging other women not to “betray the nation” by associating with Chinese men – many Mongolian women feel somewhat disillusioned by the gender norms and expectations delineated by contemporary Mongolianness. The double burden of work and domestic duties, carried out often single-handedly, renders especially attractive the prospect of living

abroad and marrying a foreigner who works and does not drink. Aware of the difficulties faced by Mongolian women in finding a good, hard-working and financially-secure husband, some families actively encourage their daughters to study foreign languages in the hope they'll marry a rich foreigner, but such practices remain subject to social opprobrium and often lead to permanent emigration.

In fact, a large contingent of Mongolian women is actively looking for a foreign husband and several introduction agencies in Ulaanbaatar cater specially for them. The largest one, *Hos bagana*,⁷ with several hundred women on its registers, facilitates contacts between Mongolian women and men from Japan, Korea, Western Europe and America; two other ones, *Ariun hair* ("Pure love") and *Mönhiin zaluu hair* ("Youth's eternal love"), focus specifically on introductions to Korean men. In the case of the latter two, the geographical focus represents less a cultural preference than available opportunities. As South Korea is a major importer of Mongolian workers, numerous ties and connections exist between the two countries, and the managers of the latter two agencies both have personal contacts there. These two agencies differ in various ways from *Hos bagana* but the greatest difference is perhaps the kind of women that are found on their registers. The clients of the latter two are mostly women in their early twenties, sometimes even younger, fresh out of high school or first and second-year university students. On their registration forms, they predominantly state that they're looking for a better life elsewhere. By contrast, the women on the largest agency's registers tend to be educated, professional women in their late thirties. According to Naraa, the director of *Hos bagana*, many of these educated women have difficulties finding a mate. Having prioritized their education and career, they often

find that men with a similar education to theirs prefer a younger spouse, frequently privileging physical rather than educational qualities. Disillusioned by the Mongolian men available to them, they contact introduction agencies in the hope of finding a husband abroad.

Interestingly, despite physical proximity to China, none of the three agencies operating in Ulaanbaatar offers introductions to Chinese men. When I asked Naraa why there aren't any Chinese men on her registers, she shrugged and responded that women wanting to meet Chinese men don't come to the agency: "They meet them by themselves. Why should it be up to us to introduce them?" (*Örsdöö l tanilstdag biz. Binüüs zaaval tedniig zuuchlah geed ch yaahuu?*). For her as well, "love" does not enter the equation when it comes to Sino-Mongolian relationships. Seen as the unfortunate precipitate of financial greed, desperation and naivety, such unions are imagined to take place surreptitiously, in nightclubs or around construction sites where Chinese men work. They're certainly not actively sought. In practice, however, far more unions between Chinese and Mongols take place than are usually imagined. A few interviews carried out with Chinese families living in the Hailaast district of Ulaanbaatar were very revealing in this regard. These families, mostly hailing from the northern provinces of China but some coming from further south, have settled permanently in Mongolia. When they came in search of work in the 1950s, these Chinese settlers were living in the vicinity of Gandan, the most important Buddhist monastery just west of central Ulaanbaatar. They relocated to the north of the city in the late 1970's, when their area (*ger horoolol*) was razed to make space for an extension of the temple

complex. Many homes in the Hailaast district are the traditional *pingfang* found in northern China (Fig. 3) and thus differ starkly from the usual Mongolian *ger* enclosures.⁸ While these Chinese houses are numerous in this area, they do not constitute a “Chinatown” sealed off from the rest, and Mongol dwellings are also found throughout the area.

<insert Fig3.jpg>

Figure 3: Chinese dwelling with courtyard and buildings in adobe typical of northern China. Hailaast district, Ulaanbaatar. Photo by the author, July 2007

What these interviews and informal chats highlighted was the high level of integration of these Chinese residents within Mongolian society and general acceptance at the local level. In fact, it was precisely because of this high integration that the existence of this Chinese neighborhood came to my attention so late in my fieldwork.⁹

Tsetsegmaa is one of these second-generation Chinese immigrants. Equally at ease in Chinese and Mongolian, she works as a translator for a Mongolian construction company that imports Chinese labor. Her parents moved to Mongolia in 1957 in search of work. Having come from Sichuan, they were somewhat unusual among Chinese immigrants who predominantly hail from the northern provinces of Hebei and Shaanxi. Since the passing away of her husband twenty years ago, Tsetsegmaa’s mother continued raising her children on her own. She now lives in the northern

district of Chingeltei and spends her days socializing with Chinese friends, playing mahjong with them or watching Chinese television. Because she does not follow the local media and because her knowledge of Mongolian is limited, she is not fully aware of the current prevalence of anti-Chinese narratives.

Tsetsegmaa, by contrast, as an intermediary between Chinese construction workers and their Mongolian employer, is confronted with them on a daily basis. Her responses are multifaceted and complex. On some level she understands the sensitivity of the issue of Mongolian independence, but she is also aware that xenophobic narratives painting Chinese workers as hooligans and criminals have been actively whipped up by a number of political and economic actors. She believes, for instance, that some Mongolian construction companies have conveniently exploited these sentiments to expel their workers before the end of their contract, thereby avoiding having to pay them.

In her personal life, however, she has not experienced ethnic antagonism. In the district of Hailaast where she resides, she says that many of the second-generation immigrants have married Mongols and that these unions are largely successful. Her teenage son is even better integrated than she is. He can speak Chinese, and indeed does so with his grandmother, but he goes to a Mongolian school and all his classmates and friends are Mongols. In stark contrast to the vociferous anti-Chinese rhetoric voiced in the media, Sino-Mongolian encounters do not appear to be perceived in the same negative light by all.

Perhaps more striking is the discrepancy between discourse and practices witnessed at the level of sexualized relations, particularly with regards to prostitution. As was discussed previously, the monetized sexual intimacy of Mongolian girls (*hüühnüüd*) with Chinese men is central to anti-Chinese rhetoric. Perceived as sexual predators taking advantage of naïve and/or impoverished girls, or as agents of the Chinese state, Chinese men are one of the main dangers facing the Mongolian nation, it is held. However interviews carried out with a number of young women working as prostitutes in Ulaanbaatar paints a very different picture. Several of them described Chinese customers as gentle (*zöölön*), courteous (*eeldeg*) and compassionate (*enerengüi*), very good people inside (*dotroo ih goy хүмүүс байдэг*). Also, contrary to culturally-held beliefs, they often found Chinese customers to be generous and friendly, unlike Russians or other Westerners who are tight (*nariin хүмүүс*) and discuss prices in a cold, detached manner. As Baigalmaa explains: “Mongols are told from a young age that the Chinese are bad, but in reality they’re good people (*sain хүмүүс*), gentle (*zöölön*). If the girl says it hurts they will say ‘*za*’ and stop.” Inner Mongols are similarly portrayed rather positively, “often asking the girl afterwards why they’re doing that kind of job, and saying they want to help them. They’re not a bad lot (*muu хүмүүс бish*).”

Two other sex workers I interviewed had a similar positive experience of China and Chinese. After finishing high school, they started working in a sauna in Ulaanbaatar in

2005 and that's how they met and became friends. A year later, they met an Inner Mongol who invited them to work in China:

We liked it. We worked in a big place, very clean, much cleaner than in Ulaanbaatar. The people there were educated (*hümüüs n soyoltoi*). Except for another Mongol, the other girls working in town were either Chinese or Russian, so we had good business as we were unusual. We rated much higher than the local Chinese, we were on a par with the Russian girls.

When we were invited to work in China we weren't scared. We were taken to nice places and treated well. We never got any pressure from anybody. Maybe we'll go back, we haven't decided yet. People there are asking us to come back.

These personal accounts are remarkable insofar as they show China (and Chinese men) in a very different light. While in the Mongolian media Chinese men are portrayed as aggressors, requiring Mongolian men to defend and come to the rescue of Mongolian women, the experience of these sex-workers by contrast codes Mongolian nationalists as the main threat to watch out for, while the Chinese customers are friendly, gentle and generous.

These various female experiences of the Other shed light on particular processes and articulations that tend to become muffled by the clamor of anti-Chinese rhetoric. It is

by listening to these voices that the force of nationalist homogenization becomes most clearly visible. In fact, in some of these narratives the traditional roles of aggressor/ally are reversed.

The personal experience of Dulmaa, a trader at one of Ulaanbaatar's main supermarkets makes this especially explicit. Around forty years old, Dulmaa co-owns a stall with a Chinese man where she sells various canned food products from China. I first mistook her for a Chinese. Well-educated, she speaks flawless Russian and her English is also excellent. She doesn't speak Chinese, however, and communicates in English with her business partner who is also her friend. She explains that she has been working in this supermarket for several years:

I was the first person to import Chinese goods, and a couple of years later other traders here started doing the same, but they import from Erlian¹⁰ and the products are either fakes or they have expired and a new expiry date has been stuck onto the bottle. So other people can sell for 30 percent less, but I won't do that. The Chinese restaurant owners in Ulaanbaatar know my products are genuine and they come and shop here. But Mongolian-owned Chinese restaurants usually buy the cheaper products.

She tells me that, unlike most Mongols, she actually likes China, and respects the Chinese government: "They're doing a good job, making sure their people don't starve." She believes that Mongolian women have a good head for business and that Chinese men make for excellent partners:

I know several Mongolian women who are married to Chinese men; they all live in China, and they're doing well. Chinese men are supportive, unlike Mongolian men, who are lazy and just drink.

But this business relationship with a Chinese man has created numerous difficulties for her. Other female traders (most stalls are run by women) have exerted pressure on her to leave her stall. Getting hassled by the police is a regular occurrence for her:

They come and check, but everything is in order and I am a Mongolian citizen so they can't do anything, really. But twice I was made bankrupt because of the pressure I face. I don't make a lot of money, just enough to live on, but I'm honest. In Mongolia it's impossible to get rich if you're honest....

Both for her, and for the sex workers introduced earlier, despite the nationalist discourses painting the Chinese as ruthless exploiters, and warnings of other Mongols against fraternizing with them, the very pressure exerted by other Mongols is what causes them considerable distress. Importantly, these vignettes show that the tendency to paint nationalist priorities as exclusively male endeavors poses the risk of constructing a framework in which women are assumed to be pacifist, social-welfare-oriented and apolitical (Blee 1991, 3). In this last example, the disciplinary arm of national morality is wielded by the other females who work in the supermarket. They

are the ones who, by calling on the police, collude with the dominant forces who also work to keep them in a socially subservient position.

Conclusion

I have argued in this article that the anti-Chinese statements that have become pervasive in contemporary Mongolia constitute an indirect interpellation insofar as they are overtly about the Chinese but in reality do something altogether different. Essentially, Sinophobia functions as a vector of cultural and social cohesion. As a discursively-embedded enunciative practice that largely excludes the Chinese from its intended audience, Sinophobia has become central to contemporary conceptualizations of Mongolianness. Frequently interpreted as reactive and articulated on self-defense, anti-Chinese violence is in fact productive insofar as it seeks to *produce* difference and demarcate the nation's cultural and ethnic contours. However the equivalence explicitly drawn between anti-Chinese sentiments and patriotism has proven extremely damaging to women, who frequently bear the brunt of this Sinophobic discourse. For those who are in a relationship with a Chinese man in particular, the structural difficulty of distancing themselves from anti-Chinese discursive practices is often irreconcilable with the reality of their emotional life, thereby leading to considerable cognitive dissonance and, ultimately, outmigration.¹¹

The social implications of Sinophobic discourse extend far beyond the groups I have mentioned here. Despite being employed by a number of political and social actors as a rallying call, anti-Chinese narratives seamlessly seep into the entire Mongolian

population, leading to a pervasive climate of suspicion and paranoia. Because of the difficulties inherent in identifying who may or may not have Chinese ancestry, any Mongol's ethnic purity ultimately hinges on discursive performativity. As a number of Mongolian authors have pointed out (see for instance Baabar 2005, 215-220), any refusal to partake in Sinophobic speech can be read as a lack of patriotism and as a potential sign of genetic hybridity. Anti-Chinese statements are thus more than a patriotic utterance: they are a performative exercise through which the speaker discursively reiterates his or her own Mongolianness in the form of citational and highly formulaic statements. This, in turn, makes it extremely difficult for any Mongol to publicly question these established practices and to attempt a reconfiguration of Mongolianness not articulated in direct opposition to the figure of China.

The "bad subjects" described here are in this sense nothing less than dissidents. By engaging in business ventures, friendships or sexual relations with Chinese, they directly challenge core cultural assumptions. Far from representing a threat to Mongolia and Mongolian culture, I suggest that on the contrary their actions open up an important reflexive space in contemporary Mongolian politics. But while the ethnography I have presented here showcases the difficulties encountered by some Mongolian women with respect to national discourses and narratives, the assumption that all women are in a position of resistance is nonetheless facile. Indeed, what the experience of Dulmaa clearly demonstrates is that while some women do bear the brunt of an ideology articulated on resistance against a common enemy, others participate fully and willingly in the nationalist project.

Likewise, the problematic positioning of the embryonic gay Mongolian community, which I have discussed elsewhere (Billé 2010b), illustrates the dangers inherent in construing the actions of a group at odds with the mainstream as necessarily constituting resistance. If gay men in Mongolia can feel socially excluded to the extent that they are perceived as deviating from Mongolian heteronormative ideas of masculinity, they can still collude nonetheless with a dominant discourse that oppresses women. Conversely, women may be very vocal about their difficult position with respect to national discourse while at the same time expect men to “act like men” and be vocal critics of homosexuality. It is thus crucial not to romanticize actions which in some cases may be simply pragmatic – for reasons of anonymity in the case of gay men, or in the hope of economic migration for some Mongolian women.

Finally, in using the insights of theorists such as J. L. Austin and Judith Butler, my aim in this article has been to draw attention to a fundamental dimension that is too rarely integrated in discussions of xenophobia. Yet performative and illocutionary utterances constitute a fundamental dimension of hate speech. Indeed, as Sara Ahmed (2004: 51-52) has noted, through performative utterances, the speaker primarily makes a statement about herself. This aspect comes out clearly in the very formulaicity of xenophobic speech, which do not seek to contribute a new piece of information but merely to relay an emotion or affect. Effectively the communication is phatic: it is concerned less with the transmission of an actual message than with the technical function of language to maintain social relations (see Jakobson 1960).

Through the phatic function 'the addresser and the addressee check whether they are using the same code' (Žižek 2008, 79).

A further crucial remark made by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003, 69-70) must also be included here, namely that all performative utterances essentially involve a third actor who may or may not be present, but who is nonetheless called upon as a witness of the act. This argument can, I suggest, be productively extended to all forms of xenophobic discourse. As a performative utterance, xenophobia is thus not simply reflective of a relationship between Self and Other; it ultimately requires the installation of an interlocutory triad. In uttering an anti-Chinese statement, a Mongolian speaker spontaneously enters into a three-way conversation which discursively includes himself, the ideological figure of the Chinese, as well as a presumed Mongolian audience that precedes him.

Notes

-
- ¹ To ensure the safety of my interlocutors, all names in this article were changed. An exception was made for my friend and assistant Otgonhüü, who preferred I use her real name.
 - ² I am using in this paper the terms “hate speech” and “injurious speech” indiscriminately, to refer to any form of xenophobic speech addressed to a foreign or ethnic Other.
 - ³ Mongols have also consistently faced dangers linked to the environment, such as *zud*, which are natural disasters linked to excessive droughts or excessive snow.
 - ⁴ A survey carried out by the National Centre Against Violence in 1998 estimates that one woman in three experiences domestic violence (CHRD 2000).
 - ⁵ Of course this is not the case for Inner Mongols, who identify as Mongols and frequently speak fluent Mongolian yet are considered Chinese by the vast majority of the Mongolian population.
 - ⁶ Thus Batsaihan heard his Mongolian waitresses call his Chinese cook by injurious names, but only when they thought he wasn’t around.
 - ⁷ The *bagana* is the supporting wooden pole in the *ger* (see following note), while *hos* means ‘a pair’. The name thus evokes the complementarity and shared responsibilities of the two partners in the household.
 - ⁸ Also known as “yurt,” the *ger* is the traditional felt-covered tent of the Mongols and other central Asian peoples.
 - ⁹ It was only by chance that my friend and research assistant Otgonhüü heard about it in the fall of 2007, after nearly one year of working together. As far as I could tell, none of my Mongolian friends and acquaintances were aware of the existence of this “Chinese neighborhood” and all expressed surprise when I discussed it with them.
 - ¹⁰ Erlian (二连, in Mongolian “Ereen”) is the first Chinese city encountered on the railway line linking Mongolia to China. A small settlement until the early 1990s, it has mushroomed into a booming town since the opening of the international border.

¹¹ Indeed, few Sino-Mongolian couples seem to settle permanently in Mongolia. Despite actively looking for them in the course of my fieldwork, most of the couples I came across had relocated to China, and the few that did live in Mongolia consistently refused to meet with me.

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Althusser, Louis. 1971. "Idéologie et Appareils d'Etat," *La Pensée*, No. 151, June 1970
- Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Baabar (Bat-Erdene Batbayar). 2005. "Tsever tsusny mongol" [The pure-blooded Mongol] in *Bidnii Aranshin: Gurvan mongol zodoldono* [Our Nature: Three Mongols will fight], ed. D. Bayarhüü. Ulaanbaatar: Admon
- Bamana, Gaby. 2008. *On the Tea Road: A Journey into Mongolian Life and Culture*. Ulaanbaatar: Admon
- Benwell, Ann Fenger. 2006. "Facing Gender Challenges in Post-Socialist Mongolia" in *Mongols from Country to City: Floating Boundaries, Pastoralism and City Life in the Mongol Lands*, eds. Ole Bruun and Li Narangoa. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
- Billé, Franck. 2008. "Faced with Extinction: Myths and Urban Legends in Contemporary Mongolia", *Cambridge Anthropology* Vol. 28 (1): 34-60.
- Billé, Franck. 2010a. "Bodies of Excess: Imagining the Chinese in Contemporary Mongolia", Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge
- Billé, Franck. 2010b. "Different Shades of Blue: Gay Men and Nationalist Discourse in Mongolia". *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 10, Issue 2: 187-203.
- Billé, Franck. Forthcoming. "Nationalism, Sexuality and Dissidence in Mongolia" In *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, eds. Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie. London: Routledge
- Billig, Michael. 2004. *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Blee, Kathleen M. 1991. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press
- Bolormaa, H. 2007. "Hyatad, solongos hoolny gazruudyn diilenh n hayaagaa avchee" [The majority of Chinese and Korean restaurant signs are taken down]. *Önөөдөр*, 19 March
- Branigan, Tanya. 2010. "Mongolian neo-Nazis", *The Guardian*, 2 August <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/02/mongolia-far-right>

- Bulag, Uradyn. 1998. *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*. New York, NY: Clarendon Press
- Butler, Judith. 1997. *Excitable Speech*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Certeau, Michel de. 1990. *L'invention du quotidien: 1. Arts de faire*. Paris: Gallimard
- CHRD. 2000. Mongolia National Human Rights Record 2000. Ulaanbaatar. Accessed online on 22 February 2005 at www.owc.org.mn/chrd/publication/natrecoo.doc
- Erdembileg, H. 2007. "Hyatadyn manga" [The Chinese Ogre] in *Tolbogüi mongol: Esse niitlelүүд* [The Spotless Mongol: A Collection of Essays]. Ulaanbaatar: Admon
- Harrison, David K. 2007. *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Jakobson, Roman. 1960. "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics" in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press
- Jargal, M. 2007. "'Dayaar Mongol'-ynhon bиеe үнегчдйн үсиг музлах гэж байна" ['Dayaar Mongol' to shave the hair of prostitutes]. *Zuuny Medee*, 24 August 2007
- Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1994 [1991]. "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York, NY: Columbia University Press
- King, Charles. 2010. *Extreme Politics: Nationalism, Violence and the End of Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- L.A. Face. *Fuck them Chinese*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaFU6UgXKWU>
- Lattimore, Owen. 1962. *Nomads and Commissars*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Likhachev, Vyacheslav. 2007. *Political Anti-Semitism in Post-Soviet Russia. Actors and Ideas in 1991-2003*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag
- Rossabi, Morris. 2005. *Modern Mongolia: From Khans to Commissars to Capitalists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press
- Salecl, Renata. 2004. *On Anxiety*. London: Routledge
- Scheck, Raffael. 2004. *Mothers of the Nation: Right-Wing Women in Weimar Germany*. Oxford: Berg
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 2003. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press
- Strasser, Roland. 1930. *The Mongolian Horde*. London: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith

Undarya Tumursukh. 2001. "Fighting Over the Reinterpretation of the Mongolian Woman in Mongolia's Post-Socialist Identity Construction Discourse", *East Asia*, Vol. 19, 3.

Yurchak, Alexei. 2006. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Žižek, Slavoj. 2008. *Violence*. London: Profile Books